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## THE JACKSON BILL FOR A WORLD-ALPHABET

In *Bulletin 47* of the American Association for International Conciliation (501 West 116th St., New York), issued in October, 1911, Senator H. La Fontaine of Belgium, president of the International Peace Bureau at Berne, Switzerland, shows that the civilized nations, even while arming against one another, are slowly federating, having already built up eighteen bureaus of the world government. The distinguished senator will be glad to learn that, even while he was writing, steps were being taken to create a new and highly interesting agency for world federation.

On August 3, 1911, Hon. F. S. Jackson, of Kansas, introduced in the United States House of Representatives a bill (62d Cong., 1st Sess., H.R. 13240) to promote an international conference for the adoption of a world-alphabet. The bill was drawn up by Hon. J. C. Ruppenthal, judge of the Twenty-third Judicial District, Russell, Kan., author of a paper on "A Universal Alphabet" in the *Scientific American* of August 10, 1901. Fortunately the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to which the bill has been referred, is a scholarly body largely composed of university graduates acquainted with foreign languages.

A similar bill was introduced on February 12, 1888, by Hon. William Warner (50th Cong., 1st Sess., H.R. 6895) and another on December 19, 1901, by Hon. Francis W. Cushman (57th Cong., 1st Sess., H.R. 7473). They were the work of Major Frank Terry, now of Roy, state of Washington. In support of the Cushman Bill, the Washington State Teachers' Association passed the following resolution, also drawn up by Major Terry:

We believe such legislation would tend toward accomplishing the following results: (1) facilitate international communication; (2) aid foreign commerce; (3) facilitate the learning of foreign languages; (4) simplify the learning of the English language by foreign-born citizens; (5) encourage the study of the English language in foreign countries; (6) establish uniform pronunciation of geographic names; (7) provide a simple, exact, co-ordinate, or parallel, orthography of the English language for the benefit of children; (8) fix a high and perfect standard to which spelling reforms, the world over, may aspire.

Similar resolutions have since been adopted by the Modern Language Association of America, the central section of the same association, the Anthropological Society of Washington, and (on January 4, 1909) by the Pan-American Scientific Congress at Santiago, Chile. The movement has the approval of the International Phonetic Association, founded in 1886 and numbering at present over one thousand members (secretary: Dr. Paul Passy, 20 rue de la Madeleine, Bourg-la-Reine, Seine, France). The alphabet of this association, being the most widely accepted, would necessarily form the basis of discussion of the proposed conference.

A world-alphabet is a system of letters sufficient to represent the elementary sounds of all languages. For sounds which are the same in different languages it uses the same letters, while sounds which are peculiar to any language are

represented by special letters. Numerous world-alphabets have been devised; the object of the proposed conference is to reach an agreement on a single alphabet to take the place of the multitude of existing alphabets. In order to gain the readiest general acceptance and the widest and earliest utility, the alphabet will have to consist of the Roman letters, with the addition of as many modified Roman and other letters as are required in order that every sound may be represented.

The uses of a world-alphabet may be summarized under two heads: (1) as a standard means to indicate pronunciation, especially in dictionaries and language manuals; (2) as the easiest means to introduce a phonetic spelling to take the place of the present traditional spelling.

Every important dictionary indicates the pronunciation of words, using for that purpose a system of letters and marks constituting practically a phonetic alphabet. Hardly two dictionaries, however, use the same system. Owing to this multiplicity, hardly one student ever learns one of these systems by heart, so as to be able to read it at a glance. Whenever he wishes to ascertain the pronunciation, he has to consult the key. Were an authoritative world-alphabet in existence, the compilers of dictionaries and language manuals, in order to facilitate the use of their works, would in new editions use that alphabet to indicate pronunciation. Every user of a dictionary, every student of a foreign language would thus have an urgent motive to learn that alphabet; in fact he would unconsciously learn it through mere practice. It would be a boon to geographers, who are greatly hampered at present by the fact that there is no universally accepted, universally intelligible system of representing in Roman letters the numerous geographic names occurring in countries using other systems of writing. Requiring almost no effort in learning, the world-alphabet would soon be taught in every secondary school, and even in many primary schools, so that a large part of the rising generation would learn to read it as easily as ordinary print.

As soon as the world-alphabet had become an essential part of secondary and to some extent of primary education, a most important result would follow. Numerous experiments (cited by Benn Pitman in *Life and Labors of Sir Isaac Pitman*) have proved that, by using a phonetic alphabet, it takes only a month to teach children to read with tolerable fluency, and that they are thereby enabled, with very little practice, to read also the ordinary print. Of this fact, Professor Alexander Graham Bell claims to be a walking proof, having been taught by that method. In other words, *the easiest way to learn to read the ordinary print is to begin with a phonetic alphabet*, that is to say, an alphabet having one letter for every elementary sound in the language and using always the same letter to represent the same sound.

At present the schools have no great inducement to use this method of teaching children to read, because the numerous phonetic alphabets now competing for recognition lack the requisite authority, having been devised by individuals not invested with representative capacity. Teachers may well ask

why children should be forced to learn something which they would have to discard afterward. In fact a phonetic alphabet having the necessary perfection and authority can hardly be created by any other conceivable means than oral discussion by an international conference, carefully prepared, of course, through several years, by a standing committee, in consultation with experts in all countries. When such a conference, consisting of the most competent experts, acting as representatives of the foremost learned organizations and of the leading governments, shall have agreed on a world-alphabet, and when that alphabet, after practical tests carried on in all countries for say a decade, shall have been definitively adopted by a final conference, its authority will be supreme, and its utility so great that, as pointed out, many schools will at once make it a subject of study. With such inducements, the experiment described by Pitman will then be repeated with increasing frequency.

By the old method it takes, on an average, two years to teach an English-speaking child to read. When teachers, by numerous practical tests, become familiar with the fact that, by beginning with the world-alphabet, the two years are reduced to a month; when they find that this alphabet, so easily mastered, will not have to be discarded later but will constitute a valuable possession through life—the day will soon come when all the schools will *begin* with the world-alphabet.

During the transition period it will of course be necessary, after the children have learned to read the phonetic print, to teach them to read also the ordinary print, which, as noted by Pitman, will cost them hardly any effort. Thus without additional labor, nay, with a great saving of labor, the entire rising generation will become familiar with two spellings: one difficult, unscientific, with authority based solely on the whim of tradition; the other easy, scientific, accurately indicating the pronunciation, and possessing an authority based not on blind, unreasoning tradition, but on the carefully reasoned, carefully tested decision of the entire learned world and of the most enlightened governments. Being learned in youth, the phonetic spelling will lose the look of oddity which is one of the main obstacles to its adoption. Thereupon the traditional spelling, as the more difficult and less authoritative, will soon be found a useless burden, and will cease to be taught in the schools. Its survival to the present day is solely due to the fact that no other authoritative spelling has hitherto existed.

This, then, is the line of least resistance—in fact of no resistance. Create an alphabet possessing the highest authority and the weight and momentum of universality, and the phonetic spelling based on that alphabet will make its way into public use with the certainty of an irresistible force of nature, unnoticed and unaided, and without inconvenience to anybody. The risen generation need not be annoyed with the demand that it give up a habit which has become second nature; the rising generation will simply be enabled to grow up with the right habit. Even the opponents of spelling reform will welcome each successive step in the process as a decided convenience. Who is there that would not be pleased if all dictionaries used the same key to pronunciation?

The English language consists of about forty elementary sounds. Very few languages are richer in this respect. Thus in writing English, about forty letters of the world-alphabet would be required. Place a child in a schoolroom with forty other children, and in a month it will know their names and faces. In a month it would also learn the looks and uses of forty letters, if each letter always denoted the same sound. Most children would learn them from parents or playmates before they went to school. The forty letters would simply force themselves on the memory even of children who did not go to school at all. No one can seriously reflect on this point without arriving at the conviction that by this method illiteracy can in a few decades be banished from the globe. No savage so low but learns to use the sounds of his language, to string them together into words, and to associate ideas with these words. No savage so low but will learn to associate each audible sound with a visible sign, and thus be enabled to read—provided each visible sign represents always the same sound.

Two years added to every child's school time! Every educator knows what that means. The absorbing question in the educational world is how to find time, in the brief eight years of school life, for the constantly increasing number of branches that seem indispensable. Twice as much time ought to be given to physical exercise in the sunlight, twice as much to manual training; room ought at once to be made for those practical conduct lessons hitherto so strangely neglected but now making their way into the schools through the efforts of Professor Milton Fairchild of Baltimore. The gift of two additional years would mark a veritable renaissance of education.

In the United States there are twenty million children of school age—to say nothing of the three hundred million children in other lands. The saving of two years to every child would thus mean forty million years saved to the nation in every eight-year period. If time is money, what is the value of forty million years? And this enormous gain can be purchased by the trifling investment of twenty to fifty thousand dollars for two or three international conferences for the elaboration of a world-alphabet. Whoever is capable of serious reflection must admit that the Jackson Bill is the most important bill now before Congress.

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### A COURSE IN SALESMANSHIP

Salesmanship is not primarily a textbook subject. Although a few good books have been written on it, we do not depend upon them for instruction in this department of our work. To take charge of this we have been fortunate in securing Mr. Nathaniel C. Fowler, Jr., a man of wide experience in buying and selling. In his course, which is given to the senior class, there are working demonstrations of the selling of goods. These demonstrations are given by